

# ESSENTIALS

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# Winsomeness in conflict and confusion



**T**his issue of *Essentials* seems to be dominated by bishops and academics. And it is very encouraging on that account. Bishops are called on to teach the scriptures and exhort with wholesome doctrine. Christian academics ought to be students of God's word who in turn can teach others, clarifying, explaining, exhorting others to be hearers and doers of God's word.

Such encouragement is always needed, not least in the present. Conflict is part of our lives. Unfortunately often within the life of the church. Many are confused by disputes within the church. And increasingly by debates in the wider community. Some have abandoned their loyalty to the scriptures in the face of friends who live in ways they once would have seen as inconsistent with the Bible.

Confusion and conflict sometimes make retreat attractive. Which is a pity since there are many pressing issues in our society to which Christians can make important contributions. Indigenous issues; the environment; refugees; family life; economics; politics even.

Confusion and conflict sometimes expose our insecurity and lead to ungracious and unhelpful ways of responding. We have much to be thankful for in the examples of brothers and sisters who speak winsomely and clearly about many of these matters. Not least the bishops, academics, and ordinary folk who keep on speaking the gospel in the sure and certain hope that God's gospel is still the way people come to know the living God.

With an election and possible plebiscite ahead, we should pray for those who have opportunities to speak (all of us in fact) that we will do so graciously, clearly and boldly.

Dale Appleby, WA  
Editor



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# The Australian Bishops' Conference 2016

**Gary Nelson comments on the recent national conference of bishops held in South Australia.**

Gary Nelson is the Bishop of North West Australia



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**W**hat do you call a meeting of Anglican bishops from around Australia? A talk-fest? A liturgical wake? An episcopal staff retreat? A mitred endurance? Or, ...

Each year bishops gather together to discuss issues of mutual concern. In March we were ably hosted by the Bishop of Willochra in the beautiful country town of Clare, South Australia. On the surface it's an enjoyable time and I look forward to catching up with fellow bishops. Yet just below the warm greetings and shared informal moments are serious tensions arising from our theological differences. This was prominent in the 'big' issue of the meeting that focussed on the *Viability and Structures* General Synod report. An external facilitator was provided for the discussion, but a curve ball was thrown with a comment about an elephant in the room – that is, the varying theological opinions represented by the bishops present. So we then journeyed down a little detour to discuss the way we might discuss our theological differences! How this will play out next year remains to be seen.

In 'essentials' our theological differences do shape our responses to the *Viability and Structures* report—we can't escape this conclusion. Why does growth follow faithful gospel proclamation (Acts 6:7)? Why does vitality seem to be concurrent with church life centred on the trustworthy, 'God-inspired' word (Eph 4:11-16; 2 Tim 4:2)? Isn't this exactly what we should expect if the gospel is 'the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes' (Rom 1:16)?

As we ponder the future of our Anglican denomination, what are our options? Perhaps we'll soon reach the point of no return leading to a split, such as occurred in America, as the honourable way ahead. Or, just maybe, we can chart another route to bridge this increasing gap between those standing on an evangelical view of Scripture, and those who have drifted from a gospel-centred biblical approach to faith and ethics.

Personally I am not very optimistic, especially when you consider the aftermath of the Primates' meeting in Canterbury

as evidenced in the approach of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Episcopal Church of America. Last year I visited America, meeting with Archbishop Foley Beach as well as speaking at a number of churches and Trinity School for Ministry. The pain of the split at both personal and congregational level was very evident. Though, encouragingly, what has emerged is an Anglican denomination much clearer on its gospel objectives and committed to holding fast to the teachings of the Bible, particularly in the area of human sexuality—the issue that tipped them over the precipice into the waters of division. Friends, keep praying that God may have mercy on our Anglican Communion and bring those rejecting his word to repentance, along with a renewed gospel commitment.

Back to the bishops' meeting in March. It was so sad to hear of the abuse through the CEBS movement and, at times, the failure of people in authority to take appropriate action. We must learn from our past, working harder at ensuring our children are kept as safe as possible within our church environment. EFAC members should take this responsibility very seriously as it flows out of our evangelical belief and ethical stance.

The Bathurst diocesan financial problems remind us that integrity in money and property matters require careful attention. The *Faithfulness in Service* document is a helpful guide on basic financial practices to protect people from false accusation and assist us to faithfully administer our stewardship. Continuing vigilance is needed as the bar of community accountability standards is raised and churches come under greater scrutiny.

The bishops' protocols — what do we do with them? They were designed to be a means of collegial attitude and agreed action in certain areas of mutual episcopal concern. Each year there has been a recommitment to them, but recently they have come into question. This has arisen over the homosexual issue in the Diocese of Gippsland. When the agenda for the meeting first appeared there was no place provided for discussing this very significant and divisive matter. This was changed, but left to near the end. Our differences were highlighted when the possible plebiscite on redefining marriage was discussed. Very few bishops were prepared to give unequivocal support for traditional marriage as the Bible presents, and as our Anglican doctrine still maintains. For me, another indicator of how close we are to the precipice of denominational division.

Other significant matters were briefly reviewed and discussed (e.g. church planting). But they remain in the background to the elephant in the room, with its impact on human sexuality and the underlying issue of how we read and understand the Bible. Please pray for the bishops across Australia and their role as leaders of our church.



# Being a Church on mission

Stephen Hale considers the good example set by Bishop John Harrower's biblical and strategic approach to diocesan leadership, articulated in Bishop Harrower's recent Anglican Institute Lecture.



Stephen Hale is the Chair of EFAC Australia

**B**ishop John Harrower gave an outstanding Ridley College Anglican Institute Lecture on 11th April 2016 at Ridley College. It was the best attendance at one of these lectures, with a packed room. In one sense the lecture was a wonderful window into John's ministry as Bishop of Tasmania from 2000 to 2015. On the other hand, it gave us a great insight into the biblical and strategic leadership that was reflected in John's episcopate. John spoke movingly of the courageous leadership he exercised in response to the sex abuse challenge. In many ways, he set trends which became the norm elsewhere.

When John started in Tasmania in 2000, he shared his vision that the Diocese of Tasmania would be known as "The

Missionary Diocese of Tasmania', and challenged every Anglican to live as a 'missionary disciple.' He concluded his first presidential address with these stirring statements:

'You elected me, trust me. You elected a missionary, let us be missionaries together. You elected an innovator, let us be innovators together. You elected a change agent, let us change together. You elected a missionary bishop, let us be a missionary diocese.'

The full text of John's address can be found on the Ridley College website or by contacting the Diocesan office in Melbourne. Simply by listing some of the headings of John's address under the title of 'What can a Bishop and Diocesan Leadership Team do?', you get the feel of what John was on about: articulate vision, and the principles and messiness of mission; build trust; release resources to the margins; monitor the pace of change; review performance.

John Harrower set a powerful example in Tassie for fifteen years. It strikes me that it is a model that many more should consider adopting in other parts of our nation today. There are too many dioceses that are being held back by a lack of a clear sense of vision and the lack of permission giving that should be at the heart of the episcopate. A bishop is there to promote the good of the church not to hold it back.



John Harrower

'Imagine you are sitting in front of a Royal Commission Public Hearing. You are in the witness box having taken the Oath. Arrayed before you are Commissioners, barristers, staff, and because it is being live streamed, you are on view to people around the nation. It's far from a relaxed situation! The Counsel Assisting the Commissioners asks, "Without asking for a sermon, Bishop, would you mind briefly assisting us with what are Anglican values as you see and understand them?" What comes to your mind? What values define us?'

'In a conversation with the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, we asked, "What can a bishop do?" The Archbishop responded enthusiastically, "Tell the people about Jesus!" The way of Jesus Christ must be embedded in the life of each and every Anglican in Australia.'

'I recall a reporter shoving a microphone at me and stating aggressively, "So Bishop, you will be responsible for bankrupting the Church?" I replied, "I may be responsible for bankrupting the Church, but I will not be responsible for bankrupting the Gospel of Christ."'

**From John Harrower's lecture *Being a Church in Mission***

Available to download as text or audio at [www.ridley.edu.au/resource/being-a-church-in-mission/](http://www.ridley.edu.au/resource/being-a-church-in-mission/)

# Evangelicals and creation care

**Sally Shaw urges evangelicals to recognise the importance of creation care, pointing out some of the ways that some evangelicals are becoming more involved.**



Sally Shaw is studying post-grad theology and is involved with A Rocha Australia.

**N**ow is the time for Evangelical Christians to get more involved in creation care. Now is the time to reflect on the implications of our theological interpretations when it comes to caring for God's creation. The Paris Climate Change Agreement in December 2015 has shown us that significant action to curb climate change needs to happen not just with governments but with each of us.<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Christians in Australia are starting to recognise the importance of creation care, but there is still much to be done. In July 2015 *Gospel, Society and Culture: Creation Care* was published by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW.<sup>2</sup> It is an important report that leaves no room for complacency. It quotes Beisner *et al* who argue that,

"To reject environmental stewardship is to embrace, by default, no stewardship. The only proper alternative to selfish anthropocentrism is not biocentrism but theocentrism: a vision of earth care with God and his perfect moral law at the centre and human beings acting as his accountable stewards."<sup>3</sup>

This paper complements the 2012 Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, which built on the 2010 Lausanne Cape Town commitment, and is a significant voice from which we can learn.<sup>4</sup> I had the privilege of being invited to join this Consultation. It was a gathering of theologians, church leaders, scientists, and creation care practitioners from twenty-six countries, who met to develop a more deeply biblical understanding of creation care. Our aim was to create a document, 'a call', that the evangelical church around the world would be able to hear and respond to urgently at the personal, community, national and international levels. The final Statement made a number of specific calls for action, including the need for an integrated theology of creation care that can engage seminaries, Bible colleges and others to equip pastors to disciple their congregations; a theology that examines humanity's identity as both embedded in creation and yet possessing a special role towards creation; a theology that challenges current prevailing economic ideologies in relation to our biblical stewardship of creation and a theology of hope in Christ and his second coming that properly informs and inspires creation care.<sup>5</sup>

Hearing these calls requires us to put aside our presuppositions and re-read God's Word through a new lens, recognising that it is the Christian worldview that gives the only viable basis for care of the natural environment. On this basis we should not withdraw from environmental concerns simply because we feel that other approaches to environmental care are flawed. Rather, we should be all the more concerned about the issue, just as other worldviews give people reasons to be concerned about the environment. Like all genuine moral responses, these are signs of God's common grace.<sup>6</sup> We, as Beisner *et al* say, 'should be ready to enter the debate, to present and to act on the clear Christian reasons for creation care, since they can provide the metaphysical basis that ecologists are yearning for.'<sup>7</sup>

Organisations such as A Rocha Australia<sup>8</sup> and Hope for Creation<sup>9</sup> are examples of evangelical Christians taking holistic action to help curb the environmental injustices of this earth. In addition, the Seminary-Stewardship-Alliance, a consortium of evangelical seminaries and theological colleges in the USA and Australia, is seeking to take on this challenge, both in the curriculum, on campus and in other ways<sup>10</sup>

These calls and examples should compel us in our passion for justice and our love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility, seeing the biblical doctrine of creation as an essential part of the gospel story.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Paris Agreement December 2015 [http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Creation Care: A Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW, July 2015, from <http://pcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Creation-Care-Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> E.C. Beisner, M. Cromartie, T.S. Derr, D. Knippers, P.J. Hill, T. Terrell, "A Biblical Perspective on Environmental Stewardship", *Action Institute* see <http://www.acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/biblical-perspective-environmental-stewardship>

<sup>4</sup> Creation care is indeed a 'gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ'. Informed and inspired by our study of scripture we reaffirm that creation care is an issue that must be included in our response to the gospel. We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation ... Love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility, [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment)

<sup>5</sup> 2012 Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care <http://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>

<sup>6</sup> Creation Care: A Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW, July 2015, from <http://pcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Creation-Care-Report.pdf>, 7

<sup>7</sup> Beisner *et al*, 'A Biblical Perspective', no page.

<sup>8</sup> A Rocha International, <http://www.arocha.org/en/org/>

<sup>9</sup> Hope for Creation <http://hopeforcreation.com.au/>

<sup>10</sup> Blessed Earth <http://www.blessedearth.org/featured-one/seminary-stewardship-alliance/>

<sup>11</sup> Cape Town Commitment 1.7. from [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment) in the 2012 Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel: Call to Action [www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action](http://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action)

# When to make a stand: Part II

In our previous issue Mark Thompson took four examples of making a stand, three from the history of the churches over the past two thousand years and one from the New Testament itself, to make



the point that taking a stand is an entirely appropriate thing to do.

Dr Mark Thompson is the Principal of Moore College, Newtown NSW.

**S**o if making a stand against prevailing and powerful opinion is legitimate and important, when do we make a stand? Of course, just as important, perhaps more important really, is how we make a stand. How do we treat those with whom we disagree and those whom we think are compromising God's revealed truth and spiritually endangering God's people? Whatever our answer to that question, it must not disqualify the approach of the apostle Paul given to us in Scripture. We are not in a position to look down on him or dismiss his stand as a product of his own psychological make-up. The how question is a very important question and one we need to face in the FCA movement because there are differences even among us which sooner or later will need to be addressed.

In this Part II, I want to set out a brief list of theological principles to consider as we approach the other question 'when do we make a stand?'

## 3. Theological principles for making a stand

There are undoubtedly more principles than these that we could profitably consider but at least these five can give us a start.

*Firstly, the good God has given us a good word which is for the benefit of his people.* The benevolence of God is hardly controversial among us. God has demonstrated his love toward us in this, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5.8). He gives good gifts to his children. His truth is life-giving. Paul could tell Timothy that the sacred writings 'are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3.15). This means, conversely, that God's people are harmed when God's good word is obscured or denied. Error is dangerous and theological error is exceedingly dangerous. It also means that far from trying to minimise the application of this good word

God has given us we should be seeking to understand just how much of a difference it makes for our good. God's benevolence and the goodness of his word are foundational principles when considering when to make a stand. I want to ask, 'Is this teaching, is this behaviour, drawing people away from the good God's good word which nourishes and builds his people?' 'Does it build confidence in God's good word as an instrument for good or does it undermine that confidence?' 'Does it suggest that the truth expressed in God's word is incomplete, or out-dated, or ill-informed?'

*Secondly, God's word is the only authoritative basis on which to make a stand.* Our consciences may not be bound any further than the word of God binds them. That was Luther's point. We can only confidently make a stand when God has spoken and his word must not be silenced by institutional pronouncements or regulation, personal preferences or reasoning, cultural pressure, or any such thing. Here the theology of the written word of God is critically important. Because these words, though they bear the genuine conscious imprint of their human authors, are ultimately God's word to us, they bear his authority. We can insist that there is no other name under heaven given to us by which we must be saved precisely because God himself has made that known to us in his word (Acts 4.12). So when contemplating making a stand I want to ask 'Has God spoken on this issue?' 'Does his word make clear God's perspective on this truth or this behaviour?' Jesus himself, as well as his apostles, often clinched an argument with the words 'It is written'. That is because they were convinced that where the written word of God addressed an issue, that settled the matter. On that ground a confident stand can be made. 'Holy Scripture has spoken; the matter is decided' (*scriptura sacra locuta, res decisa est*).

*Thirdly, matters of indifference (adiaphora) only exist where either Scripture is silent or it gives freedom for diversity.* The concept of *adiaphora* has a clear biblical warrant in Paul's writing about circumcision. Three times he says to the Corinthians or to the Galatians the same thing: 'For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God' (1 Cor 7:19); 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love (Gal 5:6); 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation' (Gal 6:15). When it didn't matter and no one was making an issue of it, Paul could freely avoid all controversy by having Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). However, when it was an issue, when people were making something of it, Paul could resolutely refuse to endorse

circumcision: when in Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus ‘even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek’ (Gal 2:3). Similar things could be said about the practice of eating food which had previously been offered to idols. It is not an issue when no one is making an issue out of it (1 Cor 8:8) but once it is made an issue, and there is the danger of harming a brother for whom Christ died, it is no longer a matter of indifference (1 Cor 8:9–11). There are circumstances in which something which might generally be thought to be a matter of indifference becomes a matter of principle.

Historically the term *adiaphora* applied to the continuation of practices that existed in the Roman churches prior to the Reformation, such as the wearing of distinctive clerical dress and, as the *Book of Concord* (1580) put it, ‘ceremonies and church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word’. It was never applied to matters of doctrine. It was never applied to matters directly addressed in the Scriptures. There is undoubtedly disagreement in the churches and perhaps even among us here on some matters of doctrine and some matters directly addressed in the Scriptures. But these would never classically be considered *adiaphora*. They are instead a reason to keep talking as we seek to come to a common mind, not a reason to stop talking and retreat to our own view. The simple fact of disagreement on an issue between godly men and women who are all seeking to be faithful to Christ and the Scriptures is not in itself sufficient to render an issue *adiaphora*. Too many other things can be going on in those cases, some of them acknowledged, some of them hidden, even from ourselves. We

## “the goal of making any stand is not a ‘party win’ but confessing Christ and caring for his people”

must not allow too quick an appeal to *adiaphora* to close down the conversation.

There is ample ground for generosity towards people in Scripture — believers and unbelievers, those we agree with and those we don’t — and ample precedent in church history for such generosity. We are called upon as disciples of Christ to love one another and not to be divisive (Jn 13:34; Rom. 16:7; Titus 3:10–11). But there is little ground for what some oddly call ‘a generous orthodoxy’. Generosity towards people — most definitely; but tenacious faithfulness when it comes to biblical doctrine. So our decisions about when to make a stand need to take account of matters of indifference, which exist where either Scripture is silent or where it gives freedom for diversity.

*Fourth, Christian ministry must have the courage to say ‘no’ as well as ‘yes’.* Nobody likes negativity. It is much easier and much

more acceptable to say ‘yes’ all the time. And yet you don’t have to read far into the Pastoral Epistles or any of the New Testament letters actually, before you realise that teaching and correction, encouragement and rebuke, go hand in hand in Christian ministry. Of course there is the question of how you say ‘no’, how you correct and warn and administer a rebuke when that is necessary. There is no license for harshness, or censoriousness, or condemnation in the New Testament. The goal is always repentance and restoration and a life realigned to the word of God and the mission of the gospel. But God’s people need to know not only what is true and right and appropriate but also what is false and wrong and improper. The ancient creeds spoke not only of what the truth was but also about what was not true. ‘Begotten not made’, according to the Nicene Creed. ‘Two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation’, according to Chalcedon. Very often the leaders of the church, following the example of the apostles, found that saying what was true was not enough. They also needed to be clear about what was not true. For the sake of the precious people for whom Christ died, we must be prepared to say ‘No’ as well as ‘Yes’.

*Fifthly, the goal of making any stand is not a ‘party win’ but confessing Christ and caring for his people.* We far too easily dissolve into factions and tribes and parties. It is a very human trait. And it happens amongst Christians as well. At one level it is entirely normal and good that we should gather with others with whom we have a common mind and a common mission. But if it becomes an exclusive grouping, if it refuses to learn from others and to go with them back to the Scriptures to hear God’s truth together, if it is an instrument of division and not one of mission at all in reality, then the group or party or collaboration is actually an opportunity for great harm rather than great good. Our concern in speaking the truth, and confuting error, and seeking to live out what we have been told and believe, is in order to confess fully, genuinely and without hesitation that Christ is Lord. It is in order that Christ might be known in all the world and Christ’s people might be built up within the churches. So we need to ask ourselves what is the real goal for which we are making this stand: to draw attention to ourselves or to draw attention to Christ? To put down those who oppose us, or to guard and protect and build up those who belong to Christ?

**Y**ou know, even refusing to make a stand amounts to making a stand in the end. It is a statement about what matters most to you and for what you would be willing to risk misunderstanding, rejection, persecution and worse. It is always possible to do it all wrong. But not being willing to do it at all just doesn’t fit with the God who has spoken to us, the priority of Christ and his gospel, and the preciousness of his people.



# What is church for? Part III

## John Calvin in the Institutes

Ben Underwood continues to pursue answers to questions about the purpose going to church is meant to serve in our lives. This time he knocks on



John Calvin's door and discovers Calvin's appreciation for seeing church as a mother to believers, educating them in the life of faith.

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**A**s I threatened in the last issue of *Essentials*, here is yet another instalment of this meandering essay on what church is for.<sup>1</sup> I am interested to think about why we do what we do at church—all the singing and praying and preaching. What purpose or purposes are these thing supposed to serve? What am I to expect them to do for me and others present? How am I as a believer to make use of them? What am I to be seeking to do for myself as I go to church and participate in what goes on there? Having travelled backwards in time from John Piper to Broughton Knox to Thomas Cranmer and the Anglican homilies, we come to John Calvin, who has commended himself to me for many years due to his clarity of thought and brevity of expression. What does Calvin say church is for? I'll be confining myself, for better or worse, to his discussion of church in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

### JOHN CALVIN: CHURCH IS AN OUTWARD HELP TO BEGET AND INCREASE FAITH IN US

Calvin's substantial discussion of church in book 4 of the *Institutes* sets church in the context of God's help given to Christians so that we may come to believe in Christ, and also to go on and grow in our faith in Christ. He begins in this way:

'As explained in the previous book, it is by the faith in the gospel that Christ becomes ours and we are made partakers of the salvation and eternal blessedness brought by him. Since, however, in our ignorance and sloth (to which I add fickleness of disposition) we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us and advance it to its goal, God has added these aids that he may provide for our weakness.'<sup>2</sup>

The aids to which Calvin refers are the church (with her pastors and teachers), the sacraments, and the civil order. In

this way Calvin makes church, ministry and sacraments (like civil government) a provision for this age, and the time of our mortal flesh.

### Guided by her motherly care

Calvin begins to expound church explicitly in this way;

'I shall start, then with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith.'<sup>3</sup>

Calvin returns to the figure of the church as a mother in 4.1.4, after expounding the relevant sections of the creed. He writes,

'But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title "mother" how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives.'

Continuing the theme of church as education, he soon after quotes Ephesians 4:10-13 and writes, 'We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the church.'<sup>4</sup> The education that believers receive is from the mouth of the pastor as he preaches the gospel and true doctrine, which fosters agreement in faith and nourishes the believer. Here is Calvin on the ministry of the church;

'by its ministry and labour God willed to have the preaching of his Word kept pure and to show himself the Father of a family, while he feeds us with spiritual food and provides everything that makes for our salvation.'<sup>5</sup>

In discussing David's lamentation over being unable to go up to the temple (Psalm 84:2-3) Calvin says, 'Surely, this is because believers have no greater help than public worship, for by it God raises his own folk upward step by step.'<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:10-13 and its emphasis on 'building up the body of Christ... to perfect manhood' is never far from Calvin's mind when he considers what church and its activities are for. In discussing what observances will be used in the church he says that 'we should refer the entire use and purpose of observances to the upbuilding of the church'.<sup>7</sup> The image of the church as the mother of the believer, concerned pre-eminently with the education and upbuilding of her charges is vivid and pointed.



### In order to sustain the weakness of our faith

When it comes to what does in fact build up the body of Christ, for Calvin the foundation is Romans 10:17, 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ' (ESV). It is the word of Christ that nourishes and perfects faith and so that word must lie at the foundation of what happens in church. That is why the first mark of a true church is 'wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard'.<sup>8</sup>

The second mark of the true church is where 'the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution'.<sup>9</sup> In typical crisp fashion, Calvin opens his discussion of the sacraments saying, 'We have in the sacraments *another aid to our faith* (italics mine) related to the preaching of the gospel'.<sup>10</sup> It is again clear that Calvin sees God's institutions of church, ministry and sacrament as given to be aids to our faith. His definition of sacrament is

'an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promise of his good will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men.'<sup>11</sup>

Notice the purpose; 'in order to sustain the weakness of our faith.' Calvin continually imagines Christians as weak, ignorant, slothful and fickle, and in great need of the aid of God in sustaining and maturing in faith. Church is the aid God gives, the means by which God parents us by word and sacrament throughout our lives.

**'let us learn even from the simple title "mother" how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her.'**

*John Calvin on the church*

**That each one from his brother may receive the confession of faith and be prompted by his example.**

Calvin does not imagine that the receipt of word and sacrament from the pastors of the church is the only way church does us good. He sees important benefits for the congregation in the activity of common prayer and singing, benefits that come in addition to the ministry of preachers of the word and the use of the sacraments. He says,

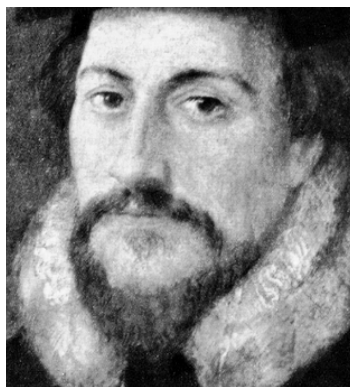
'Yet we do not condemn here speaking and singing but rather strongly commend them, provided they are associated with the heart's affection. For thus do they exercise the mind in thinking of God and keep it attentive – unstable and variable as it is, and readily relaxed and diverted in different directions, unless it be supported by various helps.'<sup>12</sup>

Calvin sees virtue in participation in common prayers because in so praying we invite and prompt others to join in the praise of God. He writes,

'But the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same

mouth, we all glorify God together, worshipping him with one spirit and the same faith. And we do this openly, that all men mutually, each one from his brother, may receive the confession of faith and be invited and prompted by his example.'<sup>13</sup>

And noting that Paul, in Col 3, 'commends spiritual songs, by which the godly may mutually edify one another', Calvin sees that singing 'has the greatest value in kindling our hearts to a true zeal and eagerness to pray.'



John Calvin (wikimedia)

### Until they at last reach the goal of faith

Calvin's answer to the question what is church for is clear – it is for helping sustain, form and grow our faith in Christ towards its maturity, under conditions of the natural weakness, sloth and fickleness of believers' hearts. Whereas Piper focused on church as aimed at enabling the inner experience of satisfaction in God, and Knox focused on church as enabling the shared experience of fellowship with one another in God's presence, and the Anglican formularies saw church as enabling an increase in our godliness, Calvin sees church as enabling faith to grow under the unpromising conditions of life in our mortal flesh.

### Concluding observations

Must we choose between church as aimed at either worship, fellowship, godliness or fostering faith, rejecting Piper or Knox in favour of Calvin or Cranmer and the Anglicans? In my judgment, if we ask who sticks closest to the exposition of church found in the most apposite biblical passages addressing the question of the purpose of church (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12-14 or Ephesians 4), Calvin would score the highest mark.<sup>14</sup> And I observe that the moderns (Piper and Knox) expound on church as the enabler of an *experience* (worship or fellowship, respectively), whereas the reformers focus on church as the enabler of a *progression*—growth in godliness (Cranmer et al) or maturity in faith (Calvin). (Perhaps the 20th century's penchant for the existential makes its presence felt by contrast to the reformer's penchant for, well, reformation!)

Looking at the differences between our theologians another way, if we try to distil the basic or foremost conception of who the church-going believer is in relation to God from their writing, it seems to me that for Piper the believer is a spiritual worshipper of the one glorious God; for Knox the believer is a joyful fellowshipper with Father, Son, Holy Spirit and God's

people; for certain Anglican homilies, perhaps the believer is best summed up as the thankful and dutiful subject of a great and kind King, and, finally, for Calvin the believer is a child in need of much care, help, instruction and encouragement to stick with Christ, encouragement that comes from our Father through the motherliness of his church. These conceptions then inform the exposition of the purpose of church in the various authors, giving us—expressed in an exaggerated manner to amplify the distinctives—church as stairway to the heavenly places (Piper); church as the communion of saints (Knox); church as our bounden duty and service (the Anglicans); and church as God's home-schooling (Calvin). There is a job to do in comparing these with the New Testament's conception(s) of the church-going believer in relation to God (see note 14 below).

However interesting it may be to exaggerate the distinctive harmonics in these different accounts of church, it is perhaps best in closing to note how much they share the same basic frequencies. They have a fundamental conception of what church is for in common. They all want the word of God in the ears of the congregation from the mouth of ministers. They all want ministers who are stirred up by the word of God themselves and are able to stir up the congregation with the same. They all believe church should be a place where God inflames us with love for him and all that is his. They all want the congregation to respond to God in praise and prayer. They all, to some extent, value the example that one believer sets for another as we engage with God together, and also the opportunity that the presence of other believers provides for love to grow up between Christians. May God make our churches such places as these.



<sup>1</sup> See *Essentials* Autumn 2015, p4-8 for Part I and *Essentials* Autumn 2016, p7-9 for Part II.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.1 (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2. Ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles. (LCC; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p1011.)

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.1, Battles p 1012.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.5, Battles p 1017.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.10, Battles p 1024.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.5, Battles p 1019.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.10.32, Battles p 1210.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.9, Battles p 1023.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.9, Battles p 1023.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.1, Battles p 1276.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.1, Battles p 1277.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.31, Battles p 894.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.32, Battles p 895.

<sup>14</sup> And so maybe there should be a part IV to this essay, finally arriving at the New Testament itself, which must be the measure of all our theological accounts of church.

## The scholarly significance of Leon Morris

Neil Bach, having recently published a biography of Australian New Testament scholar Leon Morris, just can't shake his enthusiasm for Leon and the impact of his scholarship.



Neil Bach is the author of *Leon Morris: One Man's Fight for Love and Truth*.

**M**y recent biography of Leon Morris<sup>1</sup> gives a comprehensive overview of his interesting life and fascinating scholarly pursuits. In considering his significance as a scholar, a worthy exercise in itself, I offer a few observations.

Leon Morris was unusual in having no formal theological education until he arrived at Cambridge aged 35 for his Ph.D. His lifelong habit was to write straight out of his head and then check what others thought. That he was so confident in theology and yet had been quite diffident in his early studies is a matter of interest.

Leon drilled a deep significant mine of truth at Cambridge in his Ph.D. study on the atonement and drew from it throughout his career. It demonstrated his already developed belief in the cross as central to the Bible and to Christianity. His analysis changed scholarly thinking about the cross and exhibited its power and meaning again. We acknowledge that concepts of God's love, righteous opposition to sin, Christ's sacrifice, redemption, righteousness and so on were known before Leon arrived. His application of rigorous scholarship as an evangelical academic pioneer in the establishment of the truth of penal substitution, against more liberal treatments, marked him out.

His significance was marked by his complete and passionate attachment to evidence-based conclusions, arising from his scientific beginnings. When once asked of views of another scholar Leon took the man's book down and looked at a passage in question. He told me that he had reviewed the man's sources, went behind them to supporting data, but that sadly the scholar's views were not supported by the sources, in fact some claimed sources didn't exist. Leon liked evidence and it controlled his interpretative framework. He was also significant for the way he rigorously searched for the meaning of biblical words. He used the word's wider background, moved through the original meaning to the use of such words (and terms) in the Bible to determine biblical meanings.<sup>2</sup>

Leon was retiring by personality, but forthright within academia; in his post-Ph.D. days he trail-blazed a rising standard of evangelical scholarship in Australia by his world-class contribution and the institution of a Tyndale Fellowship in Australia. He put his mind to truths put forward by other scholars that troubled his conservative wing and produced a credible defence of various matters. Only a few evangelicals were available to do this. A small example of his time is his booklet *The Abolition of Religion*, in response to the *Honest to God* debate. He later wrestled over issues within evangelicalism such as the inerrancy debate and women in ministry amongst others. His conclusions have shaped evangelical thinking. He was an encourager and mentor of numerous evangelical scholars that followed him. People like I. Howard Marshall, Graeme Cole, Peter Adam, Tom Schreiner, Brian Rosner and pastors like John Stott record their debt to Leon. Stott relied heavily on Leon's view of the atonement in his popular book *The Cross of Christ*.

## ... in this arena, Leon Lamb Morris is an Aussie hero.

Leon's emphasis remains in a number of modern conservative writings.

It might seem odd to say, but people could understand his teaching and writing. Leon was apparently judged to be more understandable than some of his colleagues. A student at Ridley College, Melbourne, later a successful vicar, had a fine law degree and had sat under some very astute university lecturers. He was amazed at Leon's teaching. He said that he could not believe the precision and clarity of Leon's teaching compared to what he had experienced in his law faculty. This clarity significantly helped students, academics, Christians and non-Christian learners in their understanding. His influence in teaching students who became vicars and church leaders across Australia has to be noted. In his own Melbourne Diocese, his fight for love and truth was most clearly seen and the diocese is the richer for it. He wrote so that English, American and other Christians also received great teaching in the central issue of the cross and other truths. When he travelled—which he did, extensively, until he was 74—he poured his heart out for others in his teaching. Leon was a scholar who could preach and relate to the church. I argue, and you can assess it in the book, that he turned his mind to helping the church as much as academia in the latter half of his career. His extraordinary humble servant perspective came to the fore, as even though he was more suited to pure writing, he and his wife Mildred juggled academic and general ministry responsibilities.

Then there is significance as a scholar in having sold some two million books of the depth of Leon's work. A few years ago in Nashville, I asked a young lady in the main Christian bookshop, did she have any books by a guy called Leon Morris? She fiddled with the computer and said 'Oh ... Oh ... yes, we do have a few ... would like to buy some?' In all of this Leon never forgot his roots, and never forgot that people needed to be saved and established in Christ. I outline the connection in Leon's thinking of the cross of Christ and how it impacted his passion for evangelism in the biography.

Lastly, Leon saw himself as an ordinary human being. There were several major obstacles during his personal life and ca-



Leon Morris

reer, some within and some outside himself. It was only the deep spiritual relationship he had with Jesus Christ, his God-given humility, prayer and love of God and scholarly capital that he had built up over the years that enabled him to get through some of these trials. You will have your own view of his significance as a scholar. My unashamed view, having spent eight years on and off researching his life, is that in this arena Leon Lamb Morris is an Aussie hero.



<sup>1</sup> Neil Bach, *Leon Morris: One Man's Fight for Love and Truth* Authentic Media / Paternoster 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Adam develops these principles further in Peter Adam 'Morris, Leon Lamb,' in Donald K McKim, ed., *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 2nd Edition, Downers Grove / Nottingham, IVP, 2007, pp. 751-55.

# Sermon at the Ordination of Richard Condie as Bishop of Tasmania

Peter Adam preached at the ordination and installation of Richard Condie as the twelfth Bishop of Tasmania at Hobart's St David's Cathedral on the 19th of March 2016. Here is the text of his sermon from 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2.



Peter Adam is Rector Emeritus of St Jude's Carlton, Vic.

**W**e are here to pray. This is a prayer meeting. We are here to pray for you Richard, because for those who are members of the Anglican tribe in Tasmania, you are becoming our bishop, and we owe you a warm welcome and our prayers for you this and every day. We are here to pray for you, because for some of us we are welcoming you to the Tasmanian community. We are here to pray for you, because some of us are your family and your friends. And we are here to pray for you, because we belong to the Anglican Church of Australia, and recognise you as a valued friend and colleague in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Possibly the most powerful thing any of us will do today is to pray for you. Because our powerful and gracious heavenly Father is always ready to hear and answer our prayers, and to use them powerfully by his grace and kindness. As we pray for you today, we will pray that God, who has made you in his image, will continue to transform you into the image of his Son, the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. We will pray that God will give you gifts and energy and love and wisdom for ministry. We will pray that God's blessings in Christ will fill you, so that you in turn bring his blessings to many people, throughout the years of your ministry in this role. So God will use the prayers we pray today, to bless countless people throughout your ministry in Tasmania, and beyond.

If you are used to praying, then today please pray fervently, please approach God with confidence through the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest, please pray with faith, trusting God to hear and answer every prayer prayed by every person in this building today. If you are not used to praying to God, then please use the words written in the service for your prayers, and trust that God is always more ready to hear our prayers than we are to pray, and that he covers the weakness of our

prayers with the power of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. And our prayers today will reach their climax in the prayer during which our Primate lays his hands on Richard's head, and prays the actual prayer of ordination. We are here to pray. And God will answer our prayers.

But Richard, at this point, you are here to listen, and what fun it is to be able to preach to you, when you are not allowed to interrupt, object, or walk out! It is a rare and thoroughly enjoyable treat, and one which I treasure very deeply. And perhaps others present will also benefit from what I am saying to you today.

I am going to preach to you from Paul's second letter to Timothy.

'But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.'

'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.'

'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.'

I want to remind you of three lessons from this section of Paul's letter.

*First: the message of the Bible in the Old Testament—as also, by the way, in the New Testament—has the power to instruct people for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.*

We are ignorant of God, and we need to know. We need to know, so we need God's book, the Bible, to teach us. We need salvation, rescue from our own sins against God and against others, rescue from God's judgement of our sins, and rescue from the power of our sins to damage us, and damage others. We only find this salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, sent by God to rescue us and bring us home to God.

Bishop Daniel Wilson<sup>1</sup>, once bishop of Calcutta and Australia said,

'Do not be afraid of distinguishing in your own mind ...what is preaching the gospel and what it not. There is one way to heaven, and but one. He that points out that way, preaches the gospel; and he that does not, preaches not the gospel, whatever else he may preach,'

*Second: the Bible Old Testament and New Testament is inspired by God and so is powerful to train us for the tasks of ministry.*

So we read:

‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.’

As a matter of fact, the focus of this verse is not so much ‘everyone who belongs to God’, as it is the Christian leader, as, for example, you, Richard. How will you be equipped for every good work you have to do as Bishop of Tasmania? The answer is, of course, *by the Bible*.

And what are those works? We will hear a summary of them later in this service. They are: to maintain the Church’s witness to the resurrection of Christ from the dead; to protect the purity of the gospel; to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord; to guard the faith, unity and discipline of Christ’s church; to promote its mission in the world; to ensure that God’s word is faithfully proclaimed, and his sacraments duly ministered; to lead and guide the priests and deacons under your care; to be faithful in choosing and ordaining ministers; to watch over, guard, protect and

## **“the Bible alone is the instrument of ministry entrusted to you at the moment of your consecration ... This is not an empty ritual.”**

serve God’s people; to teach and govern them, and be hospitable. You must know and be known by them, and a good example to all.

And we could add more: Be a tribal chief to Anglicans. Be a spokesperson in the media. Contribute to the welfare of the Tasmanian community. Do the work of an evangelist. Keep your head in all situations. Encourage others to use their gifts. Be an effective leader. Be a competent administrator. How will you be equipped for every good work you have to do as Bishop of Tasmania? By the Bible.

Your ministry will certainly be wide! It must also be deep, and continuing depth only comes from the Bible and from prayer. But then—

*Third: you have to preach the word, using the powerful Bible as your tool of ministry, and with lots of teaching and lots of patience.*

‘In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.’

Use the Bible, because of the power of the Bible to show people the way to God’s salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Use the Bible, because the power of the Bible makes it useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Yet, how will you use the Bible?

‘In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.’

This charge is given in the presence of God, and in the light of the judgement of God. In words of a French spiritual writer addressed to a bishop on the day of his ordination, and quoted by Daniel Wilson, ‘On the day of congratulation, remember the day of examination’. You are not here to please people, you are here to please God in all that you do. As Paul says elsewhere in 2 Timothy, ‘Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth’ [2:15].

The Bible and the Bible alone is the instrument of ministry entrusted to you at the moment of your consecration or ordination as bishop. This is not an empty ritual. Your special robes, your pastoral staff and a cross, they are reminders to you, and to us, of your weighty responsibilities, but the Bible is your instrument of ministry, the powerful means God has provided for you to preach the gospel and train people in God’s service. It is given to you: use it! A bishop without a Bible is no bishop at all, according to this service. It is not enough to use the Bible in the liturgy, if you don’t preach from it. It is not enough to have learnt the message of the Bible, and not continue to study and learn from it. It should be a book which is old, but always new; familiar but always strange; known, but always giving us new and deeper revelations of God and his ways. It must be in every part of your life, and in every decision you make, and in every act of ministry, including preaching, teaching, training, counselling, warning, encouraging, comforting, and telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ, and calling on them to turn to him in faith and obedience. The Bible must be in your liturgy, in your life, and on your lips. The Bible must be in your mind, in your memory, in your meditation, and in your ministry. A bishop without a Bible is no bishop at all.

Strong words? Actually, I have just been explaining some of the questions you will soon be asked in this service;

Q: ‘Are you convinced the holy Scriptures contain all doctrine necessary for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Will you instruct from them the people committed to your care, teaching nothing as essential to salvation which cannot be demonstrated from the Scriptures?’

A: ‘I am convinced, and will do so, with God’s help.’

Q: ‘Will you then be faithful in prayer, and diligent in the study of the Scripture, so that you may be equipped to teach and encourage with sound doctrine?’



Photographs courtesy of Mr Adam Croser and The Anglican Diocese of Tasmania

A: 'I will, seeking to discern the mind of Christ by the Spirit of God.'

Q: 'Will you proclaim the gospel to all, especially those among whom you live? Will you lead those in your care to obey our Saviour's command to make disciples of all nations?'

A: 'I will, gladly bearing witness to Christ in the power of God.'

I have just been explaining and filling out the words the Primate will say to you, as he gives you the Bible, as the instrument of your episcopal ministry:

'Richard receive this Bible, study it well, and expound its teaching. In it are contained the words of eternal life. Take them for your rule, and declare them to the world.'

The Bible must be in your mind, in your memory, in your decisions, in your private life in your public life, on your lips, in your conversation, and in all of your ministry.

**T**his service of the ordination of a bishop has so much focus on the Bible as the source of all true knowledge of God, as the source of the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and as the chief instrument of Christian ministry because it is based on the Reformation Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who worked on providing services which were biblical in content and aim.

'These books, therefore, ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all in our hearts. The words of Holy Scripture be called words of everlasting life (John 6): for they be God's instrument, ordained for the same purpose<sup>2</sup>.

'For the Scripture of God is heavenly meat of our souls: the hearing and keeping of it maketh us blessed, sanctifieth us, and maketh us holy; it turneth our souls; it is a light lantern to our feet; it is a sure, stedfast, and everlasting instrument of salvation; it giveth wisdom to the humble and lowly hearts; it comforteth, maketh glad, cheereth, and cherisheth our conscience; it is a more excellent jewel, or treasure, than any gold or precious stone; it is more sweet than honey or honeycomb; it is called the best part, which Mary did choose; for it hath in it everlasting comfort.<sup>3</sup>

According to the great Cranmer scholar Ashley Null, in Cranmer's mind the Scriptures 'tell, turn, and tether'.<sup>4</sup> They tell us of God, they turn us to God, and they tether us to God.

'And there is nothing that so much strengtheneth our faith and trust in God, that so much keepeth up innocency and pureness of the heart, and also of outward godly life and conversation, as continual reading and recording of God's word. For that thing, which by continual use of reading of Holy Scripture, and diligent searching of the same, is deeply printed and graven in the heart, at length turneth almost into nature.'<sup>5</sup>

Cranmer knew that we need 'the pure word of God' in our services and in our lives. Because of that, here are some questions I will ask you at regular intervals for the rest of your ministry: Do you still trust the Scriptures? Are you still studying the Scriptures, and learning at ever deeper levels as you study? How long is it since your reading of the Scriptures changed the way you live or do your ministry? Are you using the Scriptures in your preaching, not merely as a launching pad for the rocket of your own ideas, but as the substance, content and purpose of your preaching and for the substance of your application? Are you using the Scriptures in all other parts of your ministry: in counselling, evangelism, in pastoral conversations, and as the guide to your leadership and wider ministries? Are you giving God the microphone in your teaching and preaching, by projecting God's eloquent words in the Bible?

For the great danger you face is that your increased quantity and level of responsibilities will lead to such a busy life, that the time you are able to commit to prayer and the ministry of the word will suffer. Like the apostles in Acts 6, you need to ensure that you have time for prayer and the ministry of the word, both in preparation and in presentation. Otherwise you will have a ministry which is 'a thousand miles wide, but only an inch deep'. Only prayer and the Bible can deepen your ministry.

In the words of Daniel Wilson's friend and supporter, the great English preacher Charles Simeon: 'My endeavour is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not thrust into it what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding'.<sup>6</sup>

I wonder if you know of the famous character in ancient Greek mythology, whose name was Procrustes. He was an inn-keeper, and had a famous bed in his inn, which he boasted was a wonderful bed, which would be comfortable for anyone to sleep on. What actually happened to hapless travellers, attract-

ed to the inn and the bed, was that Procrustes would ensure that they fitted the bed, either by cutting off their legs if the bed was too short, or by stretching their bodies on a rack, if the bed was too long.

We preach Procrustean sermons when we crowd out the ‘first text’, that is the Bible, by using a ‘second text’, which may be our own ideas, or popular psychology, or the latest ideas about leadership, or the most recent book we read. I am sorry to say that it is very easy to preach Procrustean sermons, in which the Bible is either cut short to fit what the sermon is about, or stretched beyond its natural meaning, to fit the mind of the preacher. The most common way in which this is done today, is to say, ‘Well, this Bible passage reminds me of something Hildegaard of Bingen said, or ‘This reminds me of a comment of Tim Keller’. The Bible is then left behind, having been used as a mere launching pad for the preacher’s own agenda. When the Bible is preached as it is, God’s voice is heard in the Bible reading and the sermon. For, as Christ said, quoting the Old Testament,

‘It is written, “We do not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” [Matthew 4:4].

**W**ell Richard, all obvious? Yes. All elementary? Yes. All clearly taught in the Bible? Yes. All clearly expressed in this service? Yes. But, as a friend of mine often says, ‘It goes without saying, so it needs to be said.’ Let the Bible, not your diary, rule your life. What we hear shapes our lives, so we are indeed blessed if our ‘delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law [we] meditate day and night’<sup>7</sup>. For individually and corporately, ‘we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’<sup>8</sup>.

Richard, I pray that the wonderful miracles of our Old Testament reading, Ezra chapter 8, happen again and again in Tasmania during and through your ministry. Here they are: God’s people wanted to hear God’s words. Ezra was well trained to teach them God’s words—for as we read elsewhere, he had devoted himself to study, do and teach the word of God. When Ezra opened the Bible, everyone stood up, because they knew they were in the presence of God, as God spoke to them from the Bible. Ezra’s assistants helped the people to understand the Bible. The people rejoiced because they had understood God’s words, responding with tears and joy.

The venerable Bede, an early English Bible commentator, applied the ministry of Ezra to the Bishop of Rome. I want to apply it to the Bishop of Tasmania!


*First:* ‘But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.’ The message of the Bible in the Old Testament—as also, by the way, in the New Testament—has the power to instruct people for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

*Second:* ‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.’ The Bible—Old Testament and New Testament—is inspired by God and also powerful to train us for the tasks of ministry.

*Third:* ‘In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.’ Then you have to preach the word, using the powerful Bible as your tool of ministry, and with lots of teaching and lots of patience.

**R**ichard, may you be able to say with St Paul, as you end your ministry,

‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.’

Richard, may God be in your head, and in your understanding. May God be in your eyes, and in your looking. May God be in your mouth, and in your speaking. May God be at your end, and at your departing. May God in his mercy sustain you in these priorities until your life’s end, for Christ’s sake. Amen. 

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Wilson was Bishop of Calcutta, 1832-58 which included India [incl Pakistan], Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], Burma [now Myanmar], Malaysia and Singapore and Australia that is Sydney and Tasmania [then Van Dieman’s land] until 1836 when Bishop Broughton became Bishop of Australia [with Nixon becoming the first Bishop of Tasmania in 1842].

<sup>2</sup> Homily, ‘Reading of Holy Scripture’. Although the Homilies were published anonymously, it was Cranmer who was responsible for them. It is likely that he was the author of this Homily, as also of Homilies 3, 5, and 6 in this First Book of Homilies. RS Bond, pp. 26-31. ‘

<sup>3</sup> Homily, ‘Reading of Holy Scripture’.

<sup>4</sup> Ashley Null, ‘Thomas Cranmer and the Anglican Way of Reading Scripture.’

<sup>5</sup> Homily, ‘Reading of Holy Scripture’.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Simeon, *Evangelical Preaching: An anthology of sermons by Charles Simeon*, an introduction by John R.W. Stott, Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon, 1986, p. xxxiii

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 1:2

<sup>8</sup> Based on Matthew 4:4.



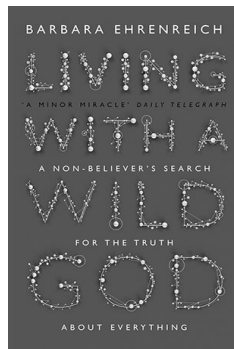
# BOOK REVIEWS

## ***Living with a Wild God***

*A non-believer's search for the truth about everything*

**Barbara Ehrenreich**

Granta, 2014.



the book. While her personal papers were being sorted and sent off to a university library for preservation, she kept back

'a thick reddish folder or envelope of the old fashioned kind, tied by a string. It had survived for about forty-eight years

I have developed a habit of reading Christian memoirs, especially those writings which reflect on a conversion of one kind or another. Lately I've enjoyed Thomas Oden's *A Change of Heart*, Peter Hitchen's *The Rage Against God*, Esther Baker's *I Once Was A Buddhist Nun* and Francis Spufford's *Unapologetic*, among others. Now Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Living with a Wild God*, is resolutely not a Christian; she refuses monotheism, rejects any idea of a perfect God with a good plan for our lives. Yet she was, as a teenaged atheist, driven to discover 'what's really going on here?' (37), that is, what is life about? What is the meaning of it all? *Living with a Wild God* is about that quest of hers, which she dropped for most of her adult life of writing and social activism, but has returned to in her seventies. The book a very personal wrestle with her upbringing, her attempts to build a foundation for knowledge and, centrally, her desire to come to grips with an overwhelming mystical experience she had as a young woman.

Ehrenreich's unfinished business with the events of her young life is dramatically described at the beginning of

through god knows how many moves from state to state and from one apartment to another. In all that time I never opened it and never mentioned or referred to it. But somehow I had always remembered to pack it in the bottom of a suitcase, no matter how chaotic the circumstances. Future graduate students could snicker over my love affairs and political idealism if they were so minded, but they could not have this.' (X)

In the folder was a series of loose leaf, intermittently produced, personal writings from her teenaged years that led up to 'an event so strange, so cataclysmic, that I never in all the intervening years wrote or spoke about it' (XII). Ehrenreich knew that these papers required 'a major job of exegesis, a strenuous reconstruction of all that I once thought was better left unsaid'. Hence *Living with a Wild God*, and if that doesn't intrigue you, I don't know who you are.

The quest begins in Ehrenreich's awareness of the brevity and apparent futility of life. Her family raised her to reject religion in favour of an anti-authoritarian atheism, and to embrace thinking as the road to the answers to questions that trouble you, and so

Ehrenreich seeks to exercise her sharp young mind in pursuing her quest to make sense of life by thinking. There are a couple of problems she faces in this. One is finding a sure place to think out from. The rationalist Ehrenreich tries to begin with radical doubt, and quickly discovers that there's 'simply no way to get from "I" to "not I" once you've boxed yourself in to what I later learned is called Western dualism' (p37). Ehrenreich seems genuinely to have struggled to be anything but a solipsist until her early twenties, and even after that she was not really convinced about the reality of other minds until she had children (218).

Another difficulty she has in her quest is that she began to experience episodes of altered perception, moments where, 'something peeled off the visible world, taking with it all meaning, inference, association, labels and words' (47), where 'all that was familiar would drain out of the world around me' (49). The teenaged Ehrenreich wrote that, 'it is as if I am only consciousness, and not an individual at all, both a part of and apart from my environment. Strange. Everything looks strange as if I'd never seen it before.' (49). Ehrenreich can see how a materialist, neurological explanation might account for these episodes, but she is not ready simply to understand these things as mere temporary perceptual breakdowns. She wonders whether they are instead perceptual breakthroughs—glimpses of the substance of things lying under the named world.

But then these episodes of dissociation are completely surpassed by an experience she has at seventeen. Early one



morning, walking in an unfamiliar town, returning from a skiing trip, 'I found whatever I had been looking for since the articulation of my quest, or perhaps, given my mental passivity at the moment, whatever had been looking for me.' '[T]he world flamed into life. ... It was a furious encounter with a living substance that was coming at me through all things at once ... the only condition was overflow.' (115-6)

After that she knew 'that the clunky old reality machine would never work the same way again. I knew that the heavens had opened, and poured into me, and I into them.' (117). That was the day 'the truth arrived in all its blinding glory', but Ehrenreich felt it was an experience she could neither speak nor recapture, although it divided her life decisively into 'before' and 'after'. It was an experience she could not make sense of, and as she writes her memoir, she interprets the experience as affecting her as a trauma, a catastrophe, knocking her into a spin and leaving her feeling like a failure, unable to testify to the truth she had encountered. Then it was time to go to college to pursue the ambition of becoming a scientist that she knew would win her father's approval. Ehrenreich seeks a new start in 'the data, the theories, the mathematical and physical

rules that other, more knowledgeable people had come up with' (145)

Yet even in the lab she is haunted by the idea that there is an Other seeking her out. Her thesis involved seeking to measure the ways voltage varied with current in silicon electrodes, but the voltages would not settle on fixed values, they oscillated in ways no-one expected, or could explain. Unhappy, unappreciated and under pressure, she wonders whether she is encountering 'something that was attempting to communicate with me through the voltage tracings, if only I could make out the message'.

There's much more in this narrative about Ehrenreich's early life — her difficult relationships with her father and mother, for example, and the book is an engaging and frank attempt to reconstruct the inner life of the young Barbara. But what I wanted most of all to know is how she would finally try to integrate her 'Encounter at Lone Pine' with her view of reality. When she does do this, in the final chapters, she refuses to countenance any consideration of God, theistically understood. From what she writes, she seems to do this out of sheer determined prejudice, believing for various unarticulated reasons that God is some kind of easy non-answer, a refusal to think. It feels like there is also

deep loyalty to her family way operating here. I must say this seems itself an easy and probably unfair shutting down of the possibility theism might be true. What she is prepared to try to integrate into her atheism is that there may really be an Other or Others: living (although perhaps not organically), intentional (although not necessarily benevolent or moral), perhaps emergent within the universe and present to us in various ways (through nature as well as in experiences like Ehrenreich's). Ehrenreich's last words in the book are 'it may be seeking us out' (237).

What shall we say to this? This is the inner world of a particular card-carrying, vocal atheist. Who'd have known, if Ehrenreich did not have such candour, and the conviction that she owed it to her younger self to write this book? Ehrenreich is doing what we all seek to do to various degrees, that is, to make sense of the world as we experience it. Reading Ehrenreich's own testimony to her experience, it hardly seems like a narrative confirmation of atheism, a world devoid of transcendent glory. Rather it seems like it's a world where it's hard to shake the idea that Someone is there, encountering us, and seeking our attention.

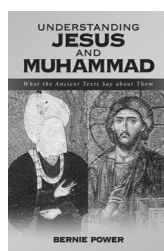
**Ben Underwood, WA**

## ***Understanding Jesus and Muhammad***

*What the Ancient Texts Say About Them*

**Bernie Power**

Acorn Press, 2016.



ing men for the person wanting to make an informed decision. It is honest and hard hitting without being aggressive or offensive. There are numerous unexamined 'defeater beliefs' (see *Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs* by Tim Keller) deeply ingrained in Muslim thought, and

Bernie addresses them in a way that is warm, expert and accessible. The book reflects Bernie's love of the Bible; deep knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadiths; and his love for Muslims.

Each chapter was originally a pamphlet Bernie wrote to explore difficult ideas with Muslims. Among the chapters are pairs such as: 'The sinlessness of Jesus Christ' and 'Was Muhammad Sinless?';

'The miracles of Jesus' and 'Muhammad and miracles'; 'Jesus, violence and peace' and 'Muhammad and violence'. Presenting these and many other important topics (Women, Trinity, Death, Resurrection and Faith) in this way provides a transparency and intelligibility about the issues.

Bernie worked amongst Muslims in Asia and the Middle East for decades and his fluency in Arabic, his passion for Muslims and his PhD in the hadiths are the foundation for the genuine expertise evident in this book. I have already read this with a friend, and many wide-ranging discussions ensued. Don't miss the opportunities you have to do the same. Buy it, read it and give it away to your Muslim friend.

**Karen Morris, Vic**

**I**f you ever talk to Muslims about faith, then Bernie Power has written the book you need. There are many books about Islam or the person of Muhammad written to inform Christians, but this book is actually for Muslims. Finally, we have a book we can give away, written specifically with the questions of Muslims in mind.

*Understanding Jesus and Muhammad* explains the truth about those history- chang-

# Tolerance, or a contest of power?

**Peter Corney laments the way changed convictions about tolerance and intolerance replace the contest of ideas with the contest of power in our public life.**



Peter Corney writes, speaks, mentors and consults on leadership for various organisations

**T**he Catholic Archbishop of Hobart has recently been taken to Tasmania's anti-discrimination commission for distributing a pastoral letter on the doctrine of marriage to the church's members! The complainant also seeks to have all church schools forced to promote LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) awareness, tolerance and behaviour. This is a misguided, repressive use of the law and a suppression of free speech and freedom of religion.

As well as the many serious concerns this raises about our democratic values, it also highlights the unsatisfactory drafting of our anti-discrimination laws that generally are far too broad and do not have sufficient protection of freedom of speech. It is becoming increasingly difficult to conduct an intelligent, reasoned, respectful and open public debate on issues of values, morality, ethics and religion without fear of legal action and the resulting suppression of free speech. Behind this repressive and dangerous atmosphere lies a radical change in the way we understand tolerance and intolerance.

The traditional or liberal view of tolerance is based on the following two key ideas which can be expressed in the following way: (1) it has an egalitarian view of people. Every person is equal and has an equal right to their views and beliefs and a right to express them respectfully. (2) It has an elitist view of ideas. Not all ideas, views and beliefs are equally valid or sensible, some are true, some are false, some are just, some are unjust, some are dangerous and some are just plain silly. So while everyone has a right to speak not all views and beliefs are right. This is what we might call 'principled tolerance.'

The current view of tolerance and intolerance turns this on its head. (1) It has an egalitarian view of ideas and beliefs. All ideas, views and beliefs are equally valid (a relativist view) and therefore should not be critiqued. (2) It has an elitist view of persons. Only persons with this relativist view about ideas have

a right to speak in the public forum. All others with a different understanding about ideas and truth and who wish to contest people's views and critique them, no matter how respectfully, may not speak! If they do they will be branded intolerant and discriminatory.

There is also another more sinister force at work here. Some lobby groups have worked out this change that has taken place in people's view of tolerance and intolerance and exploit it very skilfully in the media and public forums to suppress criticism and reasoned argument about the particular ideas they are promoting. Many in the media are easily drawn into this strategy. For a diverse society sensitive to any ethnic, religious or cultural divisions that might create disharmony or public disorder this sensitivity is a very easy but cynical button to press for strategic campaign reasons.

The new view of tolerance and intolerance owes a great deal to postmodern thinking and its anti-foundationalism and rejection of objective truth which has reinforced the relativist position. The English philosopher Roger Scruton has a very apt and ironic comment on this trend in contemporary thought; the very reasoning that sets out to destroy ideas of objective truth and absolute value imposes a political correctness as absolutely binding and a cultural relativism as 'objectively true'.

In the end all this leads to the death of the contest of ideas and the emergence of our very destructive default position, the contest of power. In the battle of 'the will to power' eventually one side imposes by force their will on the other by unethically suppressing their right to dissent by either ridicule and closing down discussion or by the force of laws like our current anti-vilification legislation that while well intended were poorly drafted and while never intended to restrict the right of free speech can be used to do just that. This 'violence' to the other is the beginning of the destruction of our liberal society.



## Comments invited on feature articles

If you have a brief, reflective, good humoured, candid, generous, shrewd or even witty comment or question (of one hundred words or less) that you'd like to share with the *Essentials* readership regarding one of our Features articles in this issue, namely: Making a Stand (p4), What Is Church For? (p6) or Leon Morris the Schol-

ar (p8), then fling your *bon mot* the way of essentialised@gmail.com by July 31.

## Introducing Erin Browne

EFAC Australia together with its Victoria-Tasmania branch are delighted to announce the appointment of Erin Browne as Administration Assistant, supporting Adam Cetrangolo in his role as Branch Chair (Vic-Tas) and National Secretary. Through

Erin, EFAC will gain an increased online and social media presence, as well as effective event planning and management. Erin is studying a diploma of Christian Ministry at Ridley College. She's worked as a social media consultant and in events and hospitality. Erin is married to Matthew, and is mother to Annabella. She will be employed a day a week, based at St Catharine's Caulfield South. She's on (03) 9523 8963 or at efacvictas@gmail.com.



### EFAC Australia membership (incl. Essentials)

\$40 per year (\$25 students, missionaries, retired persons).  
Essentials subscription only \$25 p.a.

### What is EFAC?

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.
2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate:
  - a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern
  - b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.
7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/ groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.



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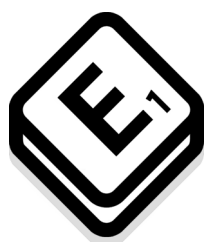
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